

Chancellor's Community Forum
5 Year Plan
November 12, 2008
Patterson ES
6:30-8:00PM
Richard Nyankori & Michael Moody

The notes below reflect our effort to summarize the comments, questions and concerns expressed at each meeting. They are not recorded verbatim and should not be considered direct quotations.

Overview: Generally participants were comfortable with the Five Year Plan, but there were many questions about how the plan impacts after-school activities and alternative learning environments. Specifically, people wanted to know about what was being done with students who had behavior issues and their impact on other students and their own learning processes. There was also conversation about parents' responsibility in children's learning.

Keywords: Full-service schools, SAM, Twilight program, alternative programs, 5 Year Plan, credit recovery, parent involvement, student discipline, Chapter 25, wrap around services, student government, Student Government Associations, Performance Plan, accountability, after-school coordinators, extracurricular activities, standards-based, attendance, individual graduation plan, Office of Student Engagement, truancy, credit recovery

Presenter/Moderator: Abigail Smith, Chief of Transformation Management
Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

Panelists: Richard Nyankori, Chief, Special Education
Michael Moody, Interim Chief Academic Officer

Other DCPS Staff: Jill Nyhus, Director of Technology, Family & Public Engagement
Veronica Madrigal, Project Assistant, Transformation Management

Codes

MR= Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

RN = Richard Nyankori, Chief, Special Education

MM = Michael Moody, Interim Chief Academic Officer

Notes

RN: Question 1. Reaction to the presentation you just saw. Question 2 is about communication and how we can communicate w/ stakeholders. Take a few moments to jot down notes about what you saw in the presentation. Then we'll talk communication strategy and anything else you want us to know.

MM: *What are some things that came up for you? What are some things that resonate with*

you? Any feedback?

CM: I like the piece with engaged community in the plan that was outlined.

MM: *What about it do you like?*

CM: This is vital for the school system to be successful.

CM: I appreciated community piece too - the importance of being part of the community, talking to parents, teachers and students. Talking to some of the students shows them that it takes more than just the parents to raise a child. The rest of the ideas for the plan will fall into place if this is there.

CM: I like all of the goals. The plan is great, including the **Performance Plan**. The only thing like I'd like to see is the policy for implementing the plan. Like if you say you are going to "Ensure the school portfolio," who is responsible for getting it done? It should be identified and it should be clear whose responsibilities are. Policy, we need it!

CM: It holds everyone accountable. All of us play a part. If we don't all collaboratively work together, a child is lost. Sometimes we allow that gap widened. I heard on the radio this morning that by the time they reach 9th grade students will have decided if they will drop out of school. We need to be mindful of President-Elect Obama's plan for education. We all have to work together. I truly believe that if we do that collectively we can really strengthen DCPS.

CM: *What part of the plan matches your vision?* On initiative 1.5.b, it says the goal will be to increase number of students into DCPS. Back in the day, Prospect Center had transition teachers – I'd like to see that come back.

RN: I agree. We might do it slightly differently. We've learned that the case manager at receiving school can build the bridge. We have approximately 2300 students but we're working on it.

MM: Other feedback?

CM: One of the things that sticks out rather blatantly is that our administration has had a significant turn around rate and it is my hope is that we keep the plan despite the turnover. Let's make the plan and work the plan.

MM: I think that's the reason for the **Performance Plan**. We've been really thoughtful about what years 1 vs 2 look like. We can tweak along the way. There is a balance being so strict of implementing the plan but allowing for it to work as needs arise.

CM: Flexibility.

MM: You're an easy group.

CM: *What are you going to do about policies about **student discipline**?*

MM: There is **Chapter 25**.

CM: I know about **Chapter 25**. I'm not looking for punitive measures because there are a lot of other factors that look into student behavior. *What are we doing there?*

CM: *Can you summarize **Chapter 25**?*

RN: This is DC's law about **student discipline** – what types of infraction involve police, etc. We wanted to look at it differently. The revisions are still happening. We asked middle school principals, “What is it that would make it so that your schools function better?” They all talked about five kids - if they weren't there life would be easier. The five kids tended to be male and over-age up to 3 years, which means they are 16-17 years old. We pulled together a program. We didn't call it school. The students told us that they wanted to be prepared for work. They didn't want to be told that they couldn't catch up. We needed to stabilize them and get them into experiences that were productive. We developed the **Twilight program**. These are the types of programs that deal with **truancy** and **student discipline** that get away from the punitive. We have built an **Office of Student Engagement**. This takes away the idea of rounding up kids to go to an attendance center. We're working on solid instruction environment and a place for kids not to be able to engage in combative environment. We need to have policies in place to let them know that it is not acceptable.

MM: We're piloting **SAM** and **full-service schools**. The focus is on student services and positive behavior. In middle schools, there are providers on campus that run a Respect Center where someone is equipped to counsel students on behavior issues and get them back into the classroom. We're trying to rethink how behavior impacts instruction. Sometimes disruptive behavior is because of the instruction being done and we need to make sure at central office that we are supporting teachers and that should narrow down the **discipline** issues. We need more intensive mentor counseling programs. The goal is to keep students in class. They're not learning when they are out of the classroom. We have piloted the program. It is an intensive process for teachers. There are going to be kinks but it should have a positive impact on the school. Kids realize that the schools are there to support them.

CM: You didn't talk about involving parents and teachers but these are two other components.

MM: There is a full-service coordinator – working with parents to help them engage them and looping teachers in; so we're not sending kids out but instead drawing students in. If we can do a good job of pulling parents in, then this is a good motivator for students to engage. Also, we don't want the lack of parent engagement to be an excuse for not implementing programs such as this.

CM: *What about elementary schools?*

MM: All eight middle schools and several full-service elementary. This is the first plan of the pilot. Last year was the planning year and then teacher training was in the summer. We've built a lot of accountability.

CM: *Do you have a lot of this online?*

MM: It's not currently available online but we can get it to you.

CM: I don't think Truesdell is doing it but we're doing something similar. The behavior specialist is busy all day long. It's really hard to meet with them and there isn't that time built into the day to meet with them. *How many people in the school are doing that work?*

RN: We decided to concentrate resources. We're stacking resources on top of resources so that there was a deep enough saturation. I'd have to look at the program at Truesdell to understand. **SAM schools** have a feeling of strong behavior and academic support.

CM: One of my concerns as you talk is about **credit recovery**. I think these programs are good for getting diploma. There are some concerns about how much time they are putting in. They are putting in less seat hours to get that credit. *The people who are teaching are they certified? Are they highly qualified? What is being done to ensure this?*

RN: I disagree with seat time. If you could demonstrate the knowledge, seat time isn't the best way. We want to get to a point to not look at time but quality. Here's a statistic I heard a few years ago: in one hour, most students spend 2.5 minutes on task. They get very little on-task time.

MM: This is a **standards-based** program. Whatever school you're in, you're following the standards. This is about outcomes and part of it is the accountability measures. We're looking at assessments. How do we know that kids get it? The other part is the quality of instruction. How are we equipping teachers to teach good instruction? In terms highly qualified, they are putting in certified teachers. It is a different set of kids that are not engaged. One of the biggest problems is attendance. How do we look at **attendance**, quality of instruction, and curricular resources?

CM: One of the things that will help with **attendance** is to survey the students and find out what their interests are. Their course outline should be aligned with what they want to do. *In terms of Portfolios, where is DCPS in reference to that piece?*

MR: In terms of the issues that you brought up around **attendance**, we're very focused on it on the secondary level. There are significant numbers of kids not involved with a school program. We need to understand what our kids are involved in – like with individual course plans (lists the courses that the students need to take) and **individual graduation plans**. We need to make sure we have academic alignment with their needs/interests. We need to have increased funding for the secondary level this year. I went to a school where they were not on track to have a yearbook or a prom. If we're creating schools that don't have those rites of

passage, we're doing the students a disservice. We need a full complement of **extracurricular activities**. We don't have enough breadth of activities; not enough girls' sports, for instance. We've piloted programs for kids at risk at dropping out. *Is there a way to engage them in a day program?* We've developed the Youth Engagement Academy, which targets 8th graders. We've put them in a small structure with more individual attention and internships. We are finding different ways of engaging this group of kids. We need to grow programs like that to meet the needs of every child. Those things are not at the scale yet – but we're piloting them. We're aggressively looking into this.

CM: You were talking about kids not having a prom, etc. In these types of situations, I would think that parents would get involved and try to resolve this situation. If the parents are not the type to be fully engaged, *what are we going to do to make sure that students' rights are being advocated for? What about advocates for these students?*

MR: We've gone to a different model for after-school – we have full-time **after-school coordinators**. We want to provide stipends to teachers so we can hold them accountable. We just piloted a program with Accenture who adopted Cardozo High School. Seniors at risk of failing were matched with tutors – and 100% graduated. The mentors said that it wasn't so much the tutoring that was most important but it was that the students didn't have advocates for them. We have had a lot of interests from other organizations who are interested in adopting our schools; the more that we can do this, then we're going to create a dynamic of **accountability**.

CM: **Student government** is missing. We need to have **Student Government Associations** – where students take ownership. That's where these activities come into play.

CM: When I was in school, we would fight for what we deserved. The student mindset now is that “they are doing this to us and we have to take it.” They don't feel like they have any power.

CM: I think what's missing is that a lot of people think high school is important – but it's really elementary school that's important. By the time students reach the 5th grade, they don't need parents to escort them to school. We are forgetting about the little ones. My son's class has 29 kids; next door the class has 25 kids. The teacher has to deal with behavior issues and then pass them along to the next teacher. Why pass the child if the child is not up to grade level?

CM: It also starts at home. We can't hold the school responsible for everything. We have to turn off the TV, help with homework, and partner with school. We can't keep pointing fingers. We, parents, need to assume responsibility. That's why it is called a partnership. If you're not working with the school, then you're not partnering. If you've always done what you've always done, then you're going to get what you've always gotten.

CM: I agree. But it isn't the parent that is giving the test. It is up to the teacher. Some kids work better in small groups. The teacher's clock is ticking and you've only got one teacher.

CM: It is said a lot that we need to involve the parents and I believe it. As a teacher, I had a student in 1st grade who was at a preschool level and didn't know number or letters. I had to have parent to come and train her to help her child learn. I needed to teach the parent. Then the child wasn't there on Fridays. But then found out the child's parent was getting cancer treatment. These are the children that we have and the parents we have. The teacher who got the child after me was angry with me because that parent expected that level of help I had provided. I have at least 5 parents like that this year. We have to develop a partnership. Do you really know how much work it is to teach a parent how to parent? A lot of times it is more disruptive to have a parent comes in.

MM: Everyone in the system has a big job. It's important to give our kids what we need. Thank you for being here. What I am hoping is that you can continue conversations. Patience and perseverance. Centrally we're trying to be thoughtful.

CM: On question #2, there is a good book by Joyce Epstein. She talks about spears of involvement – parent, community & school. She gives a whole lot of ideas.

CM: Just want to echo class size. I don't want to blame anyone. If there are enough people in the building and if there are still classes with 30-35, then it doesn't matter.

CM: We also need **full-services**. The majority of schools don't have counselors, social workers. We need **wrap-around services**. Everyone has to get into this. You also have to talk to the teachers. I'm going to say that again. They are the ones in the classroom.

CM: Maybe you could have a forum for teachers.